Leaders Honored at 5th Annual Telehealth Summit of SC

By Melanie Ferretti, Executive Assistant, Office of the State Director

The 5th annual Telehealth Summit of SC was held March 28-30, 2017. The Telehealth Summit, produced by Palmetto Care Connections Telehealth Technology for South Carolina, brought together individuals interested in the use and expansion of telehealth for a multitude of services including: stroke care, maternal fetal medicine, school-based telehealth, telepsychiatry, inpatient critical care and outpatient clinical visits.

Commissioner Mignon Clyburn of the Federal Communications Commission, gave the Thursday keynote address. For being a tireless advocate for consumer and citizens' rights, she was presented with the National Telehealth Champion Award for SC.

L to R: Ryan Burnaugh, Research Analyst for the SC House Ways & Means Committee; Kathy Schwarting, MHA, Executive Director, Palmetto Care Connections and Co-Chair, SC Telehealth Alliance; and Representative Murrell Smith, State Telehealth Champion Award recipient.

The Community Innovator Award was presented to Meera Narasimhan, MD, DFAPA, Chair of the Department of Neuropsychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, USC School of Medicine. She is a visionary, a trailblazer, and a passionate leader who thinks outside the box to address unmet medical needs. She has been part of innovative delivery systems of telehealth since 2008. Dr. Narasimhan foresees continued expansion of practical uses of telehealth statewide, nationally, and internationally.

Rick Foster, MD, of the SC Hospital Association, recognized and presented South Carolina State Representative Murrell Smith and South Carolina State Senator Thomas Alexander with the State Telehealth Champion Award for their dedication, leadership, and guidance in creating a strong telehealth network in South Carolina. Upon accepting the award, Representative Smith said, "When the idea of telehealth was brought before the Legislature, we embraced it, and it is transforming healthcare in the State; I couldn't be more proud of what we are doing. Its success is due to the combination of a number of people involved. Most importantly, it increases access to healthcare in rural South Carolina.

"I come from Sumter County and I'm very proud of our healthcare system, but like most small counties we may not have access to some specialty areas," he continued. "Now, with improvements in telehealth, someone in Aiken, Barnwell, Bamberg, or other small counties around the State can have the same access to necessary care as someone in a large county like Charleston, Richland, or Greenville. I'm proud of the small part I've played in this. I've watched the program grow over the years; it's successful, and because it's successful, it deserves continued support and investment. I thank the participating South Carolina hospital systems,

particularly Palmetto Health, Greenville Health, McLeod, and MUSC. I appreciate all of you here. Your interest and involvement is fantastic."

In addition to receiving the State Telehealth Champion Award, Senator Alexander joined the final session of the conference, a panel to discuss *The State of Telehealth in South Carolina*. "From a legislative standpoint and my personal perspective, when we look back 20 years from now and ask ourselves 'Did we get it right? Are the citizens better served as a result of our efforts?' I believe the answer will be yes," he said. "These types of initiatives and opportunities for open dialogue are positive steps towards that goal and very important to the continued growth of the State," he said.

With champions like these, the future of telehealth is unlimited.

L to R: Panel participants Stephen Gardner, MD, SC Board of Medical Examiners; James McElligott, MD, Co-Chair, SC Telehealth Alliance; Senator Thomas Alexander; Will Harms, Md, MA, Vice President of Medical Affairs, SC Blue Cross and Blue Shield (panel moderator); Meera Narasimhan MD, DFAPA, Chair, Department of Neuropsychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, USC School of Medicine; and William Jennings, MD, Chief Value and Informatics Officer, Palmetto Health.